

Amendments to the Claims

The listing of claims will replace all prior versions and listings of claims in the application.

Listing of Claims

1. (currently amended) A system wherein a participant interacts with an evolving story line that evolves through firing a series of story line triggers and that includes at least one virtual character, comprising:

a system manager including memory and a processing unit, the system manager containing information about the firing of story line triggers and about at least one virtual character in the evolving story line, and being connected to at least one form of media and at least one participant;

a message from a virtual character in the evolving story line sent by the system manager to the participant that conveys information of the story line;

a timer that;

defines an amount of time for the participant to open the message after which a story line trigger fires,

defines an amount of time for the participant to reply to the message after the message has been opened, after which a story line trigger fires,

defines an amount of time after a story line trigger is fired for a subsequent message from the same or a different virtual character to be sent to the participant;

wherein at least some story line triggers are fired based on a participant opening a message or on a response received by the system manager from the participant and wherein the story line evolves based on the firing of story line triggers
~~a response sent by the participant to the system manager that responds to the message from the virtual character; and~~
~~a subsequent message from the same or a different virtual character sent by the system manager that furthers the story line based on the participant's response;~~
~~wherein the message, the response and the subsequent message are sent while the participant interacts with the evolving story line.~~

2. (previously presented) The system of claim 1 wherein the message is an e-mail.

3. (previously presented) The system of claim 1 wherein the message includes a hyperlink that reflects a possible response by the participant.

4. (previously presented) The system of claim 3 wherein the participant is directed to the web page by clicking on the hyperlink.

5. (canceled)

6. (currently amended) A system for providing an interactive story line that evolves through firing a series of story line triggers and having a plurality of routes, wherein a participant assumes the role of a character in the story line, interacts with one or more virtual characters that are part of the story line and affects the progress of the story line, the system comprising:

a system manager that stores information about the about story line, including information about the firing of story line triggers and about the one or more virtual characters;

a message from a virtual character sent by the system manager to the participant that seeks a response by the participant; and

a timer that;

defines an amount of time for the participant to open the message after which a story line trigger fires,

defines an amount of time for the participant to reply to the message after the message has been opened, after which a story line trigger fires,

defines an amount of time after a story line trigger is fired for a subsequent message from the same or a different virtual character to be sent to the participant;

wherein at least some story line triggers are fired based on a participant opening a message or on a response received by the system manager from the participant and wherein the story line evolves based on the firing of story line triggers.

~~a response by the participant to the message from the virtual character that represents how the participant's character interacts with the virtual character of the story line and that is provided to the system manager;~~

~~wherein the system manager progresses the story line along a route based on the participant's response.~~

7. (previously presented) The system of claim 6, further comprising:

a subsequent message from the same or a different virtual character sent by the system manager to the participant that has content depending on the participant's response and that seeks a subsequent response by the participant; and

~~a subsequent response by the participant that represents how the participant's character interacts with the content of the subsequent message and that is provided to the system manager;~~

wherein the system manager further progresses the story line along a route based on the participant's subsequent response.

8. (canceled)

9. (previously presented) The system of claim 7, further comprising:

additional subsequent messages from the one or more virtual characters sent by the system manager to the participant that have content depending on the participant's prior responses and that seek subsequent responses by the participant; and

~~additional subsequent responses by the participant that represent how the participant's character interacts with the content of the additional subsequent messages and that are provided to the system manager;~~

wherein the system manager further progresses the story line along a route to the story line's interim or final conclusion based on the participant's additional subsequent responses.

10. (previously presented) The system of claim 6, wherein the message is in the form of an e-mail, video mail, voice mail, instant message, fax or phone message.

11. (previously presented) The system of claim 6, wherein the message is in the form of an e-mail containing a hyperlink to a web page, and the participant visits the web page to obtain information about the story line.

12. (previously presented) The system of claim 11, wherein the web page includes a textual, video, graphical or audio description of another character in the story line.

13. (previously presented) The system of claim 6, wherein the message is personalized by indicating the participant's real-life name or the participant's real-life address.

14. (previously cancelled)

15. (previously presented) The system of claim 6, wherein the system administrator includes a server.

16. (previously presented) The system of claim 6, wherein the message and response between the system manager and participant are exchanged over the Internet.

17. (previously presented) The system of claim 6, wherein the message and response between the system manager and participant are exchanged using wireless communication.

18. (previously presented) The system of claim 6 wherein the story line is educational, erotic, historical or involves espionage.

19. (previously presented) The system of claim 6 wherein the role of the character in the story line assumed by the participant is the participant's real-life identity.

20. (previously presented) The system of claim 11, wherein the web page contains information regarding actual events occurring in reality and fictional information that describes the story line.

21. (currently amended) A method for providing an interactive story line that progresses through firing a series of story line triggers and having a plurality of routes and one or more virtual characters, wherein a participant assumes the role of a character in the story line, interacts with one or more virtual characters in the story line and affects the progress of the story line, the method comprising:

storing information about the story line, including information about the firing of story line triggers and about one or more virtual characters;

sending a message from a virtual character to the participant that seeks a response by the participant;

defining an amount of time for the participant to open the message after which a story line trigger fires,

defining an amount of time for the participant to reply to the message after the message has been opened, after which a story line trigger fires,

defining an amount of time after a story line trigger is fired for a subsequent message from the same or a different virtual character to be sent to the participant;

wherein at least some story line triggers are fired based on a participant opening a message or on a response received by the system manager from the participant and wherein the story line is progressed along a route based on the firing of story line triggers

~~receiving a response by the participant to the message that represents how the participant's character interacts with the virtual character of the story line; and progressing the story line along a route based on the participant's response.~~

22. (currently amended) The method of claim 21, further comprising:
sending a subsequent message from the same or a different virtual character to the participant that contains content depending on the participant's response and that seeks a subsequent response by the participant;
receiving a subsequent response by the participant that represents how the participant's character interacts with the content contained in the subsequent message; and
further progressing the story line along a route based on the participant's subsequent response.

23. (canceled)

24. (canceled)

25. (previously presented) The method of claim 21, wherein sending the message comprises sending an e-mail, video mail, voice mail, instant message, fax or phone message.

26. (previously presented) The method of claim 21, wherein the message is in the form of an e-mail containing a hyperlink to a web page, and the participant visits the web page to obtain information about the story line.

27. (previously presented) The method of claim 26, wherein the web page includes a textual, video, graphical or audio description of another character in the story line.

28. (previously presented) The method of claim 21, wherein the message is personalized by indicating the participant's real-life name or the participant's real-life address.

29. (previously cancelled)

30. (previously presented) The method of claim 21, wherein the information about the story line is stored on a server.

31. (previously presented) The method of claim 21, wherein the message and response are exchanged over the Internet.

32. (previously presented) The method of claim 21, wherein the message and response are exchanged using wireless communication.

33. (previously presented) The method of claim 21, wherein the story line is educational, erotic, historical or involves espionage.

34. (previously presented) The method of claim 21, wherein the role of the character in the story line assumed by the participant is the participant's real-life identity.

35. (previously presented) The method of claim 26, wherein the web page contains information regarding actual events occurring in reality and fictional information that describes the story line.

36. (canceled)

37. (canceled)

38. (canceled)

39. (canceled)

40. (canceled)